

Conflict Management and De-escalation Tips

Be mindful of the current context:

We are living with a lot of unknowns and conflicting messages about many issues in our world today. Actions or policies have become very polarized. People are worried about and/or not clear about all of the rules or policies that are being put in place or the actions being taken by our public institutions. This can cause confusion, anxiety, and frustration, which influences some of the behaviors we might see.

Starts with De-escalating ourselves

- Listen to ourselves: before we can hear others, we need to quiet our mind so we can hear

Conflict management boils down to active listening. By listening to the customer/person, you can:

- Gain information about what concerns them
- Build trust with them
- Diffuse emotions - often people need to vent
- Bring out and clarify underlying interests and goals
- Model constructive communication for the other person

What does good listening look like?

- Practice reflective listening: allow them to speak, ask questions to clarify their concerns and interests. Make them feel heard by reflecting what you heard - their feelings, interests, and concerns. Ask for permission before your paraphrase/reflect what you have heard.
- Questions: ask open ended questions rather than closed to learn more and gain clarity.

Listening and De-escalation techniques - how to respond when someone is upset:

1. Stay calm: take a deep breath. If you are uncomfortable or struggle with conflict, is there someone else who can join you?
2. Be aware of your non verbal cues: make eye contact, remove distractions if possible, maintain open body language and a calm tone of voice.
3. Be aware of their non-verbal cues: are they exhibiting closed-off body language? Is their voice rising in volume?
4. Actively Listen: Make eye contact, remove other distractions if possible, nod/acknowledge you are listening, maintain a relaxed posture, use mirroring, and ask questions.
5. Validate and empathize: acknowledge their feelings, concerns, and accept their reactions, perceptions and feelings as legitimate. Respect them and do not judge them. Sometimes they just need to vent and feel heard. You may not be able to validate their perspective, but you can validate their emotions.
6. Explain where you/the library are coming from, in terms of your obligations to safety, intellectual freedom, etc. Inform, but do not be defensive or angry in your response. Share any necessary information about requirements or policies, and they have been made.
7. The customer may not be right: Recognize that in this unique moment, you may not be able to accommodate the customer's request. Explain why you are not able to meet their request. Inform, but do not be defensive or angry in your response. They might not understand their options, or the reasons why certain policies have been adopted.
8. Be clear of the steps you may have to take if they are belligerent or threatening to staff or other patrons: If the person continues to escalate even after you have tried the above techniques, you may need to ask for others to assist you or ask the person to leave.
9. Don't forget to take care of yourself - this situation is stressful, so be sure to check in with yourself afterwards. Take care of your needs.